DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 106 889 CS 501 070

AUTHOR Lichtig, Leo K.; Vickery, Patricia L.
TITLE A Study of Close Interpersonal Relationships.
PUB DATE Apr 75
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Chicago, Illinois, April 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Confidentiality; Credibility; *Human Relations; Interaction; *Interpersonal Relationship; Nonverbal Communication; Psychological Needs; Response Mode; Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Closeness

ABSTRACT

Based on the definition of closeness as the degree to which an individual perceives another as understanding him, this study examines some of the dimensions that appear to affect the perception of closeness in dyads. The modes of interpersonal communication which were examined are self-disclosure, touch, and metarelationship communication. Seventy-five questionnaires were completed by college students enrolled in classes in psychology, sociology, and communications. The data indicated that degree of trust and amount of self-disclosure are the primary bases for the perception of the closeness of a relationship. It is suggested that a behavioral index of the closeness of a relationship could be established by observing the amounts of self-disclosure, metarelationship communication, and touch that occur during interactions. (LL)

ED106889

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

A STUDY OF CLOSE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

BY

Leo K. Lichtig, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Patricia L. Vickery, State University of New York at Albany

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Leo K. Lichtig
Patricia L. Vickery
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

A paper presented to
the Interpersonal Communication
Division of the International Communication
Association at the April, 1975 convention in Chicago

CS 501 070

A STUDY OF CLOSE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

"Closeness" is a term that people frequently use when describing their relationships with other people. Although familiar, the term cannot be easily defined because closeness seems to be a gestalt. That is, the perception of closeness in a relationship is a complete and intricate whole rather than a sum of the perceptions of some specific element of the relationship. Therefore, any attempt to construct a model for the perception of closeness will necessarily be somewhat artificial and incomplete. With this in mind, the present study will examine some of the dimensions that appear to affect the perception of closeness. For simplicity, we will deal with dyads throughout this paper, although the theory seems applicable to larger groups.

Defining Closeness

One may theoretically define closeness as the degree to which an individual perceives another as understanding

him. This definition allows for the closeness of a relationship to be seen differently by each participant. It also provides for a relationship based on more than just initial attraction or physical closeness, which might not be included under other possible definitions. If a relationship is to be perceived as close, a person must receive some feedback from the other interactant indicating that he understands the person--e.g. he knows how the person thinks or feels, maybe why, knows what to expect from the person and knows what expectations the person himself has. If a person receives large amounts of such feedback, he will perceive a closer relationship than if he receives little or no such feedback.

In order to understand another person, one must have information about that person. The more information one has about an individual, the better one will be able to understand him.* This being the case, a less abstract definition of closeness would be the amount of information exchanged between the participants over a period of time. The amount of information that a person would let another have would be an index of the closeness of the relationship (Jourard, 1959). Using this definition, several hypotheses may be generated concerning interpersonal information exchange and closeness.

---

* "More information" is meant both quantitatively and qualitatively. The more intimate or personal the information, the more understanding it should promote. The same should hold for sheer quantity.

Hypotheses

Self -disclosure, one method of information exchange has received considerable attention (e.g. Cozby, 1972, 1973; Ehrlich & Graeven, 1971; Gilbert, 1974; Jourard, 1959, 1971; Jourard & Landsman, 1960; Jourard and Resnick, 1970; Pearce & Sharp, 1973; Pederson & Dreglio, 1968; Pederson & Higbee, 1969; Vondracek & Marshall, 1971). Self-disclosure denotes that verbal behavior by which "...one person voluntarily tells another person things about himself which the person is unlikely to know or discover from another source." (Pearce & Sharp, 1973). The discloser is revealing information about himself to the other person, therefore that person should be better able to understand the discloser. This increase in understanding should lead the discloser to perceive a closer relationship. This can be stated as an hypothesis:

> H1: The greater the amount of self-disclosure, the closer the relationship is perceived as being (by the discloser).

Touch as a mode of interpersonal communication has also been studied (eg. Frenk, 1957; Jourard, 1966, 1968; Montague, 1971). Information communicated by touch is usually not as clearly defined as in the case of self-disclosure, since touch lacks a clearly defined vocabulary. However, Morris, (1973) comments that a single touch will do more than any words when it is a matter of being under-

stood emotionally. If touch does promote understanding between interactants, then it should effect the perception of closeness. This can be formulated into an hypothesis:

H2: The greater the amount of touch, the closer the relationship is perceived as being.

As stated above, one may use self-disclosure and touch to better understand another person. However, both ways involve risks since they require a person to place himself in a vulnerable position. In self-disclosure, some of the information disclosed would be of a highly personal nature. Thus, he must trust the person to whom he is disclosing (Vondracek and Marshall, 1971). Trust means the degree to which a person expects a positive outcome from a potentially negative situation or interaction. In the case of self-disclosure, one positive outcome might be that the information is not passed on to somebody else. Another positive outcome might be that the person will accept the intimate information as important.

As a person is emotionally vulnerable during self-disclosure, he is physically vulnerable and socially vulnerable when touched. A non-human animal will attack or retreat from another animal that invades its personal space boundary (Little, 1969). Studies about the invasion of personal space in humans (eg. Felepe and Sommer, 1966) have shown that people tend to retreat or to leave the scene when another person sits 'too close'. If these reactions to

invasions of personal space boundaries originated with feelings of vulnerability, then a person would probably have to be trusted before he would be allowed to touch another person. A positive outcome for the individual being touched might be that he will not be harmed.

In social situations, disclosure of intimate information via touch also involves a risk factor. There must be trust that a touch will not be misinterpreted by the person being touched. In this case, a positive outcome might be that the person being touched will accept the touch in the way that it was intended.

The above arguements suggest that trust is needed before a person will self-disclose[5] to a person or allow a person to touch him. This can be stated in two more hypotheses:

H3: The higher the degree of trust, the greater the amount of self-disclosure.

H4: The higher the degree of trust, the greater the amount of touch.

Trust seems to grow from a series of encounters in which risks are taken. If the outcomes of these encounters are positive, then the degree of trust should increase in proportion to the risk taken. If the outcomes are negative, then the development of trust should be inhibited or reversed. Higher risks produce the potential for more positive outcomes. As lower levels of trust are supported by positive outcomes, higher risks may be taken, thus increasing the possible level

of trust. As we have seen, the degree to which one person trusts another will affect how much personal information is exchanged. This information exchange will affect the ability of the interactants to understand each other, thereby affecting their perceptions of the closeness of their relationship. Thus, the more a person trusts another, the closer he will perceive their relationship as being. This can be formalized by the following hypothesis:

H5: The higher the degree of trust, the closer the relationship will be perceived as being.

Another variable which might improve the effectiveness of communication within a relationship, but which has not been studied much, could be referred to as meta-relationship communication: discussion between individuals about their specific relationship. Meta-relationship communication would provide information to each participant about how the other person sees the relationship. Sharing feelings about the relationship would reveal any dissimilarities in their views; elaborating these differences would help them understand how the other one thinks. This increased understanding should lead to perceiving a closer relationship or, potentially, to a total breakdown of the relationship if the differences prove too great. Thus, we can predict a positive relationship between meta-relationship communication and closeness, although it will not be as great as the other hypothesized relationships due to the potential for

breakdown. This leads us to the last hypothesis:

H6: The greater the amount of meta-relationship communication, the closer the relationship is perceived as being.

Figure 1 is a diagram of the above hypotheses. Touch, self-disclosure and meta-relationship communication are techniques by which one person develops understanding of another. Trust is needed before personal information will be given to another. Since closeness has been defined as the degree to which a person perceives another as understanding him, which may be measured by the amount of information exchange, all four elements, touch, self-disclosure, meta-relationship communication and trust, should lead to an increased perception of closeness.

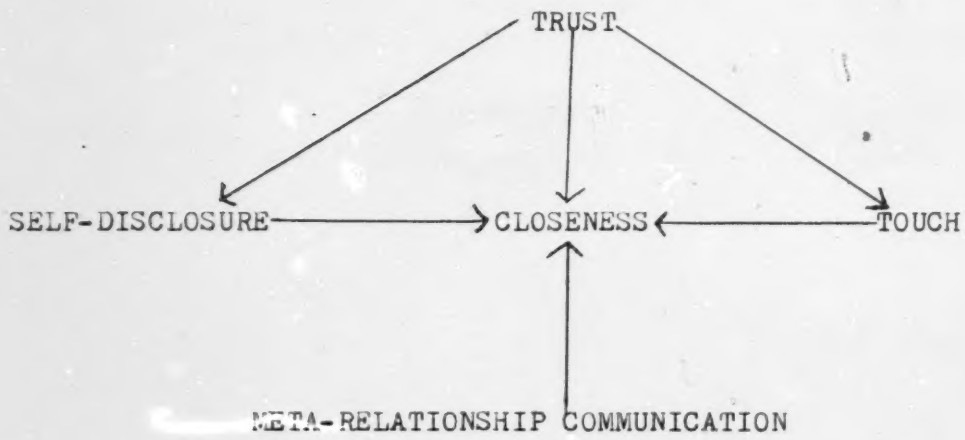


Figure 1: Diagrammed Model of Hypotheses

Methods

To test the hypotheses, a questionnaire was utilized to find out how close the respondents perceived a relationship, as well as the perceived amounts of self-disclosure, touch, meta-relationship communication, and trust in the relationship.

Sample -- The sample was drawn from six classes in psychology, sociology, and communication at the State University of New York at Albany and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York.

Of the two-hundred and fifteen questionnaires distributed, seventy-five were completed, a 35 percent return rate. Reasons for the low percentage of returns seem to be 1)the amount of time needed to complete the questionnaire (about one-half hour), 2)no inducement being provided for completion since the project was totally voluntary, and 3)the highly personal nature of some of the questions.

The questionnaires were distributed during regular class time, and the respondents were asked to return them during the following week's class. Return visits were made to pick up late responses.

Questionnaire -- The questionnaire was pretested on a small group of respondents similar to those providing the data base. Comments on the pretest dictated revision of the structure of the questionnaire and some of the items. The final version of the questionnaire asked the respondent

to provide demographic data and to answer twenty-five questions about each of ten relationships of their own choosing. Items fell into three categories including biographical information, personal perceptions of the relationships, and activities of the pair. The personal perception questions were the main source of data for this study.

Results

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was the primary statistic used to examine the empirical relationships among the variables. Since each questionnaire attempted to explore ten relationships, the seventy-five responses provided a maximum N of 750. All items had 700-730 responses usable for the statistics. Since the N is so large, very small correlations would be significant. Therefore, significance is less important than the size of the correlation coefficients. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficients among all variables in the hypotheses are given in Table 1. Descriptive statistics for these variables are provided in Table 2.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the amount of self-disclosure would correlate positively with perceived closeness. Table 1 shows that the data supports this hypothesis ($r=.62$).

Hypothesis 2 stated that touch and perceived closeness should relate positively to each other. Table 1 shows a

correlation coefficient of .34 for this relationship. While this value is in the predicted direction, its magnitude is not as high as the others, so we have less confidence in its support of the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that the degree of trust would correlate positively with the amount of self-disclosure. Table 1 shows that the correlation found was .87. This seems to suggest strong support for the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4 predicted a positive relationship between the degree of trust and the amount of touch. From Table 1 the correlation coefficient is only .32. This result is in the predicted direction, but does not indicate strong support for the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5 stated that the degree of trust would positively relate to the perceived closeness. From Table 1, we see that this hypothesis is strongly supported by the data (r=.67).

Hypothesis 6 proposed a positive relationship between meta-relationship communication and perceived closeness. The found coefficient for this relationship is .48, which indicates a significant relationship in the expected direction. Thus the data supports this hypothesis, although not as strongly as some of the others.

Discussion

Figure 2 diagrams the results of the hypothesis testing. Of the four variables that were hypothesized to relate to the perception of closeness -- self-disclosure, touch, meta-relationship communication and trust -- all correlated significantly in the predicted direction. Our data indicates that degree of trust and the amount of self-disclosure are the primary bases for the perception of the closeness of a relationship, as defined earlier.

Although there is some variation in the strength of the relationships, our data supports the hypotheses based on the theoretical definition of closeness, that is, the degree to which one person thinks that he is understood by the other. This seems true even though the correlation for touch was weaker than the others. The low correlation for touch may be due to the fact that touch seems to be used in a larger variety of interpersonal interactions than, for instance, self-disclosure is. This would have the effect of diluting its correlation with any single type of interaction.

One implication of this study is that a behavioral index of the closeness of a relationship could possibly be established. For example, by observing amounts of self-disclosure, meta-relationship communication, and touch that occur during interactions, one could estimate the trust and closeness between the interactants. Even though Ehrlich

and Graven (1971) found that "...persons are directly aware of the magnitude and intimacy of their self-disclosing behavior in dyadic encounters", more research will have to be conducted to discover how results of a questionnaire such as the one used in this study compare with behavioral observations of the same relationships.

This study also suggests a variable which may be of use in interpersonal communication research -- meta-relationship communication.* Its utility will have to be determined by any future theories which find it to b a useful concept to measure.

Finally, more research needs to be conducted to determine if the model presented in this paper is part of a larger model involving the perception of closeness, or if it is a whole in itself. Any model such as this must also be placed in its proper perspective within a larger model of interpersonal perception as a whole.

---

*(Subsequent to the writing of this paper, we have found several discussions using terms which are similar to our meta-relationship communication. See references to "meta-communication" in Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1973), and Rossiter (1974); and to "metaintimate conversation" in Intimate Relationships, by Murray S. Davis (1973), The Free Press. --- LKL, PLV 6/8/75).

TABLE 1: Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficients*

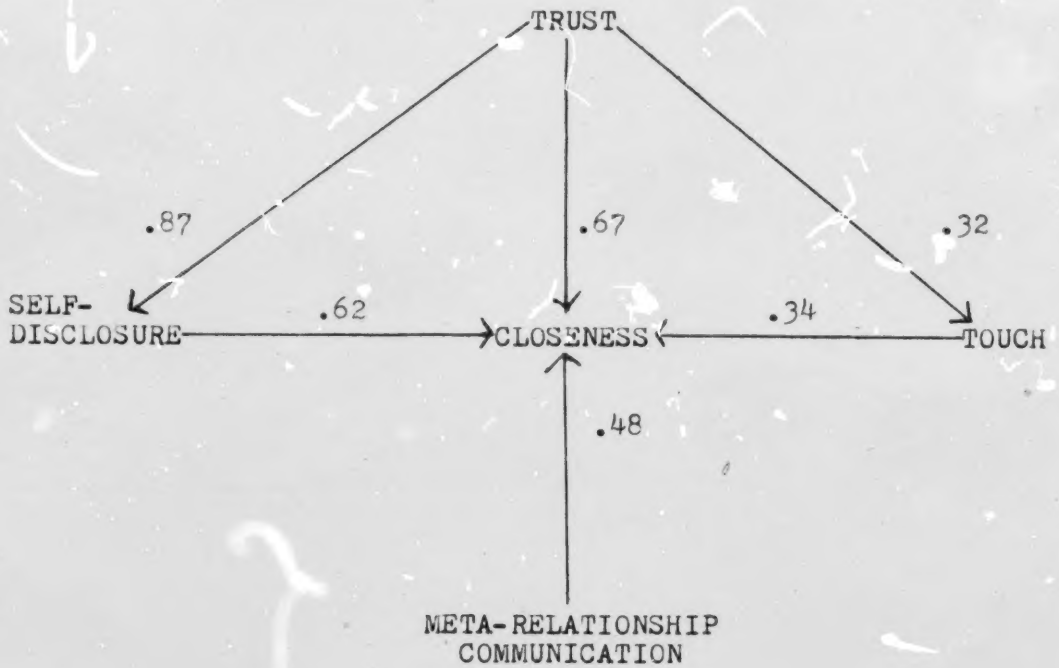
	Trust	Self-discl.	Meta-relat. Commun.	Touch
Closeness	.67 (709 df)	.62 (709 df)	.48 (707 df)	.34 (703 df)
Trust		.87 (728 df)	.43 (725 df)	.32 (721 df
Self-disclosure			.51 (725 df)	.40 (721 df)
Meta-relationship communication				.54 (719 df)

*$p < .001$ for all correlations

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Variables.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Closeness	6.96	2.42	1-10
Trust	6.87	3.20	1-10
Self-disclosure	6.16	2.87	1-10
Meta-relationship Communication	2.53	1.27	1-5
Touch	2.60	1.28	1-5

Figure 2: Diagram of Hypotheses with Correlations.



References

Alpert, M.I. "Optimal Heterophily and Communication Effectiveness" Journal of Communication, 1971, 33, 328-343.

Blalock, H.M. (ed.). Causal Models in the Social Sciences. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1971.

Cozby, P. "Self-disclosure, Reciprocity and Liking". Sociometry, 1972, 35, 151-160.

Cozby, P. "Self-disclosure: A Literature Review". Psychological Bulletin, 1973, 79, 73-91.

Goodall, J. van Lawick-. In the Shadow of Man. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1971.

Ehrlich, H. & Graven, D. "Reciprocal Self-disclosure in a dyad". Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1971, 7, 389-400.

Felipe, N. J. & Sommer, R. "Invasions of Personal Space". Social Problems, 1966, 14, 206-214.

Frank, L. K. "Tactile Communication". General Psychological Monographs. 1957, 54, 209-255.

Gilbert, S. J. "The Communication of Intimacy: A Negative Finding". Paper presented at the April, 1974 ICA Convention at New Orleans.

Johnson, D.W. & Noonan, M.P. "Effects of Acceptance and Reciprocation of Self-disclosures on the Development of Trust". Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1972, 19, 411-416.

Jourard, S. "Self-disclosure and Other Cathexis". Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1959, 59, 428-431.

Jourard, S. "An exploratory Study of Body Accessibility". British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 1966, 5, 221-231.

Jourard, S. "Self-disclosure and Touching: A Study of Two Modes of Interpersonal Encounter and their Interaction". Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 1968, 8, 39-48.

Jourard, S. Self-disclosure: An Experimental Analysis of the Transparent Self, New York: Wiley -Interscience, 1971.

Jourard, S. & Landsman, M.J. "Cognition, Cathexis and the 'Dyadic Effect' in Men's Self-disclosing Behavior". Merrill-Palmer Quarterly of Behavior and Development 1960, 9, 141-148.

Jourard, S. & Resnick. "Some Effects of Self-disclosure Among College Women". Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 1970, 10, 84-93.

Krain, M. "Communication as a Process of Dyadic Organization And Development". Journal of Communication, 1973, 23, 392-408.

Lichtig, L.K. "Social Tactile Communication". Unpublished Manuscript, Rensselaer Polytedhnic Institute, 1973.

Little. "Personal Space". Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1965, 1, 237-247.

Mellinger, G.D. "Interpersonal Trust as a Factor in Communication". Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 1956, 52, 304-309.

Montague, A. Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

Morris, D. Intimate Behavior. New York: Bantam Books, 1971.

Pearce & Sharp. "Self-disclosing Communication". Journal Of Communication, 1973, 23, 409-425.

Pederson & Higbee. "Self-disclosure and Relations to Target Person". Merrill-Palmer Quarterly of Behavior and Development, 1969, 15, 312-320.

Hossiter, C.M. "Metacommunication" Paper presented to the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New Orleans, 1974.

Sommer, R. "Studies in Personal Space". Sociometry, 1959, 22, 247-260.

Van de Geer, J.P. Introduction to Multivariate Analysis for the Social Sciences. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Co. 1971.

Vondracek and Marshall. "Self-disclosure and Interpersonal Trust: An Exploratory Study". Psychological Reports, 1971, 28, 235-240.

Watziawick, P., Beavin, A. & Jackson, D., Pragmatics of Human Communication. New York: Norton and Co., 1972.